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TOP SECRET

DF-116-K

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FLICKE: The German Intercept Station in Sofia.

1. The attached is an Army Security Agency translation of a paper written by Wilhelm FLICKE, formerly chief evaluator and the officialy designated historian of the Signal Intelligence Agency of the Supreme Command, German Armed Forces.

2. The present paper, German title: "Die deutsche Horchstelle in Sofia", supplements the (scant) previous information available to TICOM about the German intercept station in Bulgaria (cf Volume III, "The Signal Intelligence Agency of the Supreme Command, Armed Forces" in European Axis Signal Intelligence in World War II etc, p. 42). The statements about "ZERBST"(cf Flicke's account of the "Fall Lauf, DF-116) cannot be checked, however, and are possibly a human interest element introduced by Flicke as are the accounts of the Bulgarian translator and the cigarette venture. However, no reason for their fabrication by Flicke is apparent and they are probably presented by Flicke in good faith.

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2 June 1948

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FLICKE: The German Intercept Station in Sofia

The Sofia Intercept Station was set up in January 1940. Bulgarian officials had appropriated the villa of the former communist leader STOITSCHEFF (who had fled the country) in the suburb of OWTSCHAKUPPEL and put it at our disposition for the understood purposes. The operating rooms were installed here and the living quarters of the personnel were in two other small villas close by.

The reason for setting up the Sofia Intercept Station was that it was possible to intercept here those stations in international diplomatic radio traffic which could be heard but faintly at Lauf and Treuenbrietzen and in Madrid.

The new station was officialy designated as a "Seismographic and Weather Reporting Station". For internal service matters and communications with the Cipher Section in Berlin the station was known by the cover name "Bohrer".

The staff consisted of a 1st lieutenant and some 25 to 30 men. The first head, who installed the station, was 1st Lt. GROTZ. All the personnel were in civilian clothes. These people were recruited from Lauf and Treuenbrietzen.

For technical operations the station was divided into five intercept groups having three intercept receivers each.

The assignment pertained chiefly to monitoring and interception of short-wave transmissions of stations in England which were hard to intercept in Germany. Most important of these was the traffic from GLT to Turkey and GNO to Malta (VPC). Besides these the Turkish long wave transmitters TRB and TRJ, several Swiss short wave stations and individual Egyptian and Swedish radio stations were intercepted. Also the transport radio net for the American Land

Lease deliveries from the Mediterranean and Near East (the so-called WAV net) was occasionally monitored.

For quick direct communications with the Cipher Section in Berlin the "Bohrer" Station had a short wave transmitter. All transmissions from Berlin were signalled in this way. Directions for technical matters were also passed with the help of this radio connection.

In addition there was - after the entrance of German troop into Bulgaria - a direct teleprinter connection through the Armed Forces Liaison in Sofia from "Bohrer" to the "Commercial Section" in Berlin (cover name for the Cipher Section) and from there to Lauf and Treuenbrietzen Intercept Stations. A telephone connection between "Bohrer" and Lauf or Treuenbrietzen could be established inside of five minutes.

All radio intercept was regularly sent from Sofia to Berlin by a courier plane of Lufthansa.

The setting up of the "Bohrer" Intercept Station very soon answered its purpose, it supplied a great deal of traffic which was better than that of any intercept station within the Reich boundries.

Liaison with Bulgarian officials was carried out very well. The Station was given a military guard. Three or four men watched day and night at posts on the grounds. An officer of the Bulgarian War Ministry appeared from time to time at the station for orientation.

At the time German troops entered Sofia a German Abwehrstelle was set up and the head of the Abwehrstelle (Major v. Delius) organized a controll of the Bulgarian diplomatic cipher telegrams from Sofia to Turkey by means of an agent in the Telegraph Office in Sofia. He supplied photographic copies of the Bulgarian cipher texts which were delivered to the "Bohrer" Station; here a copy

was made and the photograph was sent back to the Abwehrstelle while the "Bohrer" Station sent the copy along with its own intercept material to the Cipher Section in Berlin.

This controll did not supply Bulgarian cipher telegrams alone but also he particularly supplied all cipher telegrams of all foreign powers in Sofia.

While the operations of the "Bohrer" Station generally passed without any special event several things of a very notable nature transpired in secret at the last. In the spring of 1944 a radio operator by the name of "ZERBST" (who came from Czechoslovakia and had played an active roll as a National Socialist and Party functionary in the Sudetenland there) who had been up to then employed at the Lauf Intercept Station was assigned to the "Bohrer" Station. He spoke Bulgarian very well and quickly made friends with a Bulgarian translator employed there. "ZERBST" had already carried on active sabotage at Lauf although it had not yet been detected (see my report on the "Fall Lauf"). In Sofia after a short time he got in contact with the Russian Legation there and turned over information about the German Intercept Service and its successes.

Shortly before the withdrawal of the "Bohrer" Station "ZERBST" deserted and joined a partisan group. The translator just mentioned (a German national residing in Bulgaria who had married a Bulgarian), who had been employed at the "Bohrer" Station, had also passed current information to Russian Intelligence.

The general service conditions and the life of the personnel of the station (originally rotated every two years) passed very comfortably and freely with an income of 10,000 to 12,000 Lewa monthly. However it resulted that the end of the station was dramatic.

As the general retreat in the Balkans began in the fall of 1944 it was decided in Berlin to pull back the "Bohrer" Station. All of the equipment was

loaded into two freight cars and along with the personnel was put enroute from Belgrade to Austria. Before the departure the staff of the station collected everything they were not going to take with them and auctioned it off to the highest bidder. With the results some 80,000 cigarettes were purchased with which the valiant "Bohrer" People hoped to make a good profit in their new working quarters. However they were attacked enroute by Partisans. One of the two cars, in which there was a chest of hand grenades and the 80,000 cigarettes in addition to the apparatus, received several direct hits and burned completely along with the cigarette capital.

The convoy with the remaining equipment reached Woellersdorf near Weiner Neustadt where a new intercept center was set up in a barracks. The intercept assignment stayed the same as it had been in Sofia; traffic was forwarded from Vienna to Berlin by courier.

At the end of January 1945 as a consequence of the always worsening military situation the station was moved to Ebersdorf near Chemnitz where operations were once more resumed (in the rooms of a hostel). Here finally along with the general collapse the "Bohrer" Station met its end.